



# A PRESCRIPTION FOR CHANGE

## Aging in Community Supports Program

*Facilitated by Healthy Aging Alberta's Social Prescribing for Older Adults Program*

In every community, older adults play an important role and make a positive impact on society. They serve as mentors, volunteers and loving grandparents. After a lifetime of working hard and raising families, they continue to share their wisdom and experience with the next generation.

### **Older adults deserve a life of independence and dignity.**

But this is not a reality for many Albertans. Older adults – especially those who live alone – often lack access to community-based resources needed to complement their medical care. Social supports like food and housing programs help ensure those over 55 can age in place and avoid the need for higher levels of care.

## **Bridging the Gap**

**Aging in Community Supports** is a social prescribing program facilitated by The Way In Network in Calgary. This document contains the information you need to promote social prescribing in your community and make referrals for patients and clients.

## **WHAT IS SOCIAL PRESCRIBING?**

Social prescribing is a holistic approach to healthcare that bridges the gap between medical and social care services. Through this approach, healthcare professionals refer patients to community-based programs to improve their health and enhance their quality of life.

### **Everyone should have the opportunity to reach their full health potential.**


Social prescribing promotes health equity by addressing social needs that affect health and well-being – like access to adequate housing, food, transportation, income and social support. This helps older adults with limited natural supports to thrive.

# HOW DOES SOCIAL PRESCRIBING WORK?



## Meet George

Last month, George sadly lost his wife of 50 years.



When George started losing his appetite and energy, he visited his family doctor. She identified a need for social supports to complement his medical care.

After discussing this with George, she made a social prescription to refer him to a Link Worker.



## Step 1: Social Prescription


A primary healthcare provider fills out a form to make a social prescription (referral to a Link Worker).

The Link Worker met with George to assess his social needs.

## Step 2: Link Worker

A Link Worker\* receives the referral and partners with the older adult to develop key health and social goals through community resources.

*\*A **Link Worker** is a non-clinical professional employed by a community-based, senior-serving organization. This individual builds relationships with older adults under their care and monitors their progress.*



Today, George receives transportation support in his community so he can participate in a bereavement group. He is also enrolled in a local recreation program and consults with a dietitian regularly.

## Step 3: Support

The older adult accesses community-based supports to improve their health and well-being.

## Did you know?

**Over 80%** of a person's health depends on **social determinants of health** like adequate food, housing, income, and relationships with others.<sup>1</sup>



### Social Prescribing<sup>2</sup>

**+57%**

Improves patient rating of health and well-being\*

**-41%**

Decreases the number of repeat clinic visits\*\*

\*Three months post social prescription.  
\*\*Nine months post social prescription.

### Nearly 100%

of Canadians aged 65 and older plan on supporting themselves to **live safely and independently in their own home** for as long as possible.<sup>3</sup>



1. Hood CM, Gennuso KP, Swain GR, et al. *County health rankings: relationships between determinant factors and health outcomes*. Am J Prev Med 2016;50:129–35. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2015.08.024

2. Alliance for Healthier Communities. *Rx: Community - Social Prescribing in Ontario, Final Report* (March 2020).

3. *National Institute of Ageing (NIA)/TELUS Health Survey* (2020)

## 5 KEY OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL PRESCRIBING FOR OLDER ADULTS

1

Improved physical and mental health

2

Increased confidence to live at home

3

Reduced isolation and loneliness

4

Reduced length and frequency of hospital stays

5

Increased community connections and natural support networks

## Healthy Aging Alberta & Social Prescribing

Healthy Aging Alberta (HAA) is a rich network of community-based, senior-serving organizations and allies across our province united by a shared vision: to make Alberta one of the best places in the world to grow older.

HAA was established to connect community-based, senior-serving organizations with larger systems such as health, housing, and the disabilities sectors.

Through the Aging in Community Supports program, HAA plans to assess the impact of community-based programs and services offered through a social prescribing model. This program also aims to improve the formal coordination of non-medical services that support healthy aging in community and enhance the quality of life for older adults.

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For more information, contact...

**Megan Hincks** - The Way In Network Coordinator

403-286-1811

meganh@caryacalgary.ca